

The Poisoning of Michigan

Joyce Egginton

"A landmark of environmental reporting. . . . A preview of chemical horrors yet to come . . . takes up where *Silent Spring* left off."
—STEWART L. UDALL, former U. S. Secretary of the Interior

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Afterword by Devra Lee Davis, Maryann Donovan, and Arlene Blum

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"It seemed like a small, easy mistake to make at the time: a couple of bags of a toxic industrial chemical accidentally ended up in the rations of Michigan's dairy cows—and it seems like a long time ago. But the horrific tale Joyce Egginton so masterfully tells is about the profound dangers our dysfunctional regulatory system for such chemicals still poses to the health of our citizens and our planet to this very day."

—Ken Cook, President,
Environmental Working Group

The Poisoning of Michigan is an investigative journalist's account of the widespread contamination of Michigan's dairy cattle and food supply by the highly toxic chemical PBB (polybrominated biphenyl) in the 1970s. A near relation to PCB, this now-banned fire-retardant - which is persistent in soil and in the bodies of animals and humans - was mistaken for a nutritional supplement by an illiterate truck driver at the factory in 1973. Unable to read the lettering on the brown paper sacks, he loaded nearly a ton of PBB onto his truck and delivered it to Farm Bureau Services in Battle Creek, the largest cattle feed plant in Michigan. There it was mixed with feed ingredients and sent to farmers throughout the state.

It took nearly a year to understand why cattle and other farm animals were dying, farms were failing, and people were becoming ill. In the meantime contaminated meat and milk products were sold throughout Michigan. It has since been estimated that, for more than a year, all nine million people then living in the state were ingesting this food on a daily basis. As the cause of the disaster was realized, some farmers chose to shoot their herds rather than put more contaminated meat on the market. Others facing bankruptcy sold their diseased cattle for what they could get. They received little help from the state, other than to have their farming practices questioned. A lengthy court case fought by a single dairy farmer could not match the resources of PBB's producers and failed to prove that the chemical company was responsible. But in the years following the poisoning there has been mounting evidence of widespread human health damage from PBB, and this is now affecting a new generation. Although PBB is no longer marketed in the United States, newer industrial fire retardants with the similar toxic properties have taken its place and are being used across the country in ever increasing quantities.

The poisoning of Michigan remains the largest documented case of chemical contamination in U.S. history. Now available from Michigan State University Press, **Joyce Egginton's** environmental classic, which, in Stuart Udall's description, "takes up where *Silent Spring* leaves off." At the time of its first publication, the author was New York correspondent for *The Observer* of London. For several years thereafter she taught in the Science and Environmental Reporting Program at New York University. **Joyce Egginton** has since written three books on criminal court cases, including the 1989 bestseller *From Cradle to Grave*; *The Poisoning of Michigan* was her fourth book. This reissue includes a new foreword by the author and an afterword by Dr. Devra Davis, author of *When Smoke Ran Like Water* (2002) and *The Secret History of the War On Cancer* (2007), and Director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute's Center for Environmental Oncology; Maryann Donovan, Associate Director for Research Services at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute and Assistant Professor in the University's Department of Pathology; and Arlene Blum, founder of the Green Science Policy Institute and a Visiting Scholar in chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley.

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